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ABSTRACT

Although in the past farmers have not been a traditional client group for personal and career counselors, the recent financial plight of farm families has resulted in farmers being identified as a special target group by the Canadian government. Programs, such as the Canadian Rural Transition Program (CRTP), have been established to provide assistance to farm people who are involved in situationally determined career change. The CTRP assists farm families in six different ways: (1) transition grants; (2) training assistance; (3) travel and relocation assistance; (4) self-employment grants; (5) career and personal counseling; and (6) wage reimbursement. Benefits derived from career counseling include increased self-esteem for clients; insight for the CRTP staff regarding follow-up action; less personal counseling; and discovery of new career options. In a grief model of change, old boundaries are lost and new boundaries are formed. Ultimately it is the counselor's role to assist the individual in integrating past experiences, interests, abilities, and present resources and translate this information into career options. (ABL)

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COUNSELLING FARMERS FACING SITUATIONALLY DETERMINED CAREER CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Although in the past farmers have not been a traditional client group for personal and career counsellors, the recent financial plight of farm families has resulted in farmers being identified as a special target group by the Canadian Government. Programs, such as the Canadian Rural Transition Program, have been established to provide assistance to farm people who are involved in "situationally determined" career change.

This presentation will provide information about the Canadian Rural Transition Program in Manitoba and will share a grief model and a career change model used by the two career counsellors. Personal and career counsellors working with farm changers or with other clients, who have been forced by external circumstances to make significant life changes, will find this presentation of interest.

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COUNSELLING FARMERS FACING SITUATIONALLY DETERMINED CAREER CHANGE

A Paper Presented to the Fourteenth National Consultation on Vocational Counselling in Ottawa, January 25-28, 1988

Presenters: Sherril Colert, Ed.D., Brandon University, Brandon, Manitoba, R7A 6A9,

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Farmers have not traditionally been a client group of personal and career counsellors. Over the past year and a half, however, farmers in transition have been identified as a special target group by the federal government. Programs have been established to provide assistance to farm people who, because of financial reasons, are involved in "situationally determined" career changes.

Goals:

The goals of this presentation are to assist in the understanding of (1) issues facing farmers who are undergoing situationally determined career changes and (2) issues facing the career counsellors who assist these farmers. A goal is also to gather ideas from participants for the purpose of creating an idea bank so that all counsellors assisting farm families in their personal and career struggles can be better informed and prepared for this new challenge.

Background:

Agriculture Canada and Employment and Immigration Canada established the Canadian Rural Transition Program (CRTP) in 1986. In most provinces the program is operated by the C.E.I.C. offices, but, in Manitoba, the CRTP is under the management of WESTARC Group Inc., a service connected to Brandon University with the purpose of conducting applied research and development activities. The CRTP Project Director is Reg Forbes, the Project Officer is Carl Cunningham, and the Diagnostic Resource Coordinator is Dr. Lilly Walker, known nationally for her research on farm stress (Walker & Walker, 1987). Referral resource staff include personal and career counsellors in Brandon and Winnipeg including the two presenters of this paper.

From its inception in Manitoba on September 23, 1986, to November 30, 1987, 166 farmers, mostly males, received assistance from the program. Their ages ranged from 20 to 72 with an average age of 40.5 years. The fact that approximately 57% were below age 40 supports the belief that younger farmers are experiencing more severe difficulties than are older farmers (J. Walker, 1987). The average public school education is Grade X although the range is Grade VIII to graduate and professional degrees. Most of the clients (76.8%) are married and have between 0 to 5 children ranging from below age 1 to over age 24. Most of the farmers had either grain or mixed farms and all ceased farming for financial reasons, including foreclosure, lack of operating credit, and bankruptcies.

The CRTP assists farm families in six different ways: (1) transition grants, (2) training assistance, (3) travel and re-

location assistance, (4) self-employment grants, (5) career and personal counselling, and (6) wage reimbursement. Of the 166 farm clients, 113 (68.1%) received supplementary transition grants, 36 (21.7%) received training assistance, 17 (10.2%) received mobility assistance for special and job-related travel, 16 (9.6%) received self-employment grants, 7 (4.2%) received personal counselling, 41 (24.7%) received career counselling, and 14 (8.4%) received wage reimbursement. Of the 166 clients, 39 (23.5%) had exited from the program as of November 30, 1987.

Although stress has been found in high levels in farm families (Walker & Walker, 1987) the numbers referred for personal counselling are quite low. Those who were referred had serious psychological impairments. Others were recommended for personal counselling by the project and resource staff but such help is difficult for many clients to accept.

The career counselling service produced four primary benefits (J. Walker, 1987): (1) clients indicated increased self-esteem and confidence in the job search process, (2) CRTP staff gained insight regarding follow-up action, (3) personal counselling issues surfaced and referrals were made, and (4) new career options were uncovered for a number of clients. Work areas of employed clients include trucking, bus driving, real estate, sales, nursing, and meat cutting while training locations included South Winnipeg Technical Centre, Assiniboine Community College, University of Winnipeg, Bruno's Hairdressing School and the Winnipeg Flying Club. Clients sought training in such diverse areas as upgrading, hairdressing, applied (non-farm) agriculture,

carpentry, air-conditioning and refrigeration, landscaping, locksmithing, business administration, machining, and taxidermy.

Situationally Determined Career Change:

Situationally determined career change refers to a change which is forced upon an individual because of environmental and situational factors as opposed to change resulting from self-determination. In such external pressure systems, "Individual motivation and direction appears to be totally absent, with job changes being completely determined by the environment" (Murray, Powers, and Havighurst, 1971, 6). Career change can be viewed from two dimensions: (1) the locations and (2) the strengths of the forces or pressures to change. The locations of the pressures can be internal (self) and/or external (environment) and the strength of the pressures can be viewed on a continuum from negative to none to positive. It is the combination and strength of the forces which results in a disposition to change a career or not.

Model for Career Change

		Pressures from the Self: Low	Pressures from the Self: High
Pressures from the Environment	Low	No Career Change	Self-Determined Career Change
	High	Situationally Determined Career Change	Self-Directed Accommodation Career Change

The above model, first proposed by Murray, Powers, and Havighurst (1971), later adapted by Heddescheimer (1976) and by Dean, Eriksen, and Lindamood (1987), can be useful to career counsellors assisting farmers facing career change.

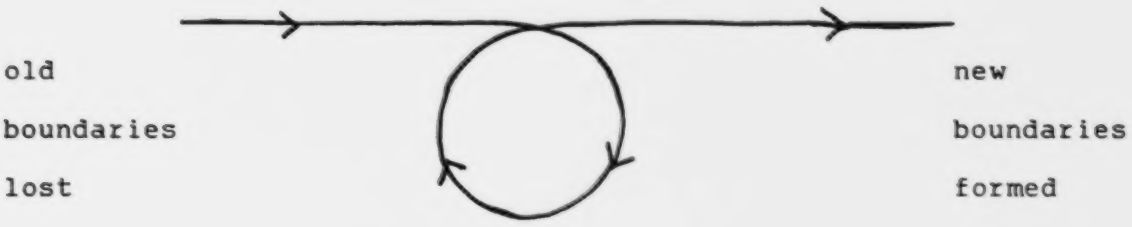
Farmers undergoing career change are motivated mostly by external factors in the environment. Many would continue farming if they could manage financially. The motivation, therefore, is external but the strength and direction of the force is confusing. On one hand, there is positive pressure to change, but the lure of rural life and the traditions of farm lifestyle, as well as a tight labour market, exert negative pressure to change. "People involved in a situationally determined career change, however, often do not desire, and are not prepared for, career change, nor are they motivated to seek out resources or to engage in activities that will prepare them for a career change" (Dean, Eriksen, Lindamood, 1987, 17). It is important for the career counsellor and for all CRTP staff to be aware of the locations and strength of the forces acting on the farm career changer.

Issues Facing Farmers:

An understanding of the situationally determined career change model, requires an understanding of a compatible grief model, which can illuminate the psychological impact of this imposed phenomenon. Farmers who have forfeited their farming careers through environmental and economic circumstances, have not "bought in" to the changes which surround them; they have suffered a loss. Although change, in the context of our position as career

counsellors, is our goal, credence must be given to the loss which accompanies this change.

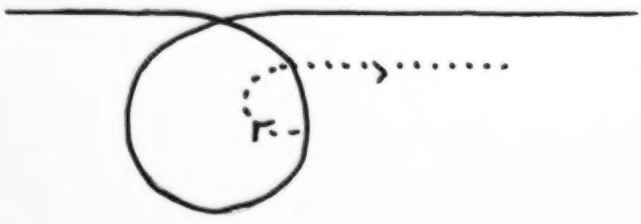
In any change the individual will experience loss, pain and the disorientation of things never again being the way they were. Keleman (1974) has done a great deal of work in the change, loss, gain cycle. This is graphically illustrated below:



> This diagram is the formative loop that I have drawn to represent the excitation around turning points. It represents how boundaries are formed.
>
> The descending side of the loop is where loss occurs, where new space is created and where emotional reactions to loss and space are experienced. The ascending side is where new excitement is sensed, where new possibilities are organized, where new boundaries are formed. In the descending side old thoughts, ideas, feeling, action patterns and connectedness are given up. In the ascending side new thoughts, intuition, and feelings are transformed into action patterns and new connections are made (Keleman, 1974, 25-26).

When clients are on the descending side of the loop they are saying good-bye - to what once was. It is likely that the first definition this loss takes is the face of a limbo loss. Is it on? Is it off? Is it gain? Is it loss? This uncertainty is exhausting. When the answer comes, and the reality is loss, most individuals are emotionally drained.

Ultimately, the reality of this loss is defined personally by each individual experiencing it. Perhaps it is best generalized by the loss of an identity, a dream, a lifestyle. Soren Kierkegaard suggested the deepest despair is for an individual "to be other than himself" (Moustakas, 1956, 198). Here the client has lost independence, history, heritage and hope. Compounding the significance of these losses is the reality that failure has brought about this change. Feelings accompanying this experience include depression, anger, lethargy, hopelessness, and reduced self confidence. This is a disintegration process. At this point, the personal counselling option of the CRTP is a much more viable option than is career counselling. Letting go is necessary before integration and new beginnings are possible. If clients pursue career counselling at this stage, there is a danger of satisficing rather than maximizing in their decision. When clients satisfice they take the path of least resistance, the easy out, rather than wholly matching their individuality to their career choice. In terms of Keleman's Loop, this action, as demonstrated by the dotted line, short circuits the grief cycle. Although on the surface this may appear a less painful option, Keleman suggests something is lost, and the individual does not return to a normal, fully functioning state.



Ideally clients pursue career counselling at a point of critical preparedness, when they are on the ascending side of Keleman's Loop. Several career counselling issues are of particular importance when discussing this particular target group. The first issue to be discussed is that of internal and external location. Internal location factors include where the clients are in the change/loss/gain cycle, and where they are in relation to their career path. Campbell et al (1979) identified four stages of career development: preparation, establishment, maintenance and retirement. It has been suggested by Latack and Dozier (1985) that people in the late establishment stage find it easier to make career transitions as a result of involuntary job loss that those in the early establishment or the maintenance stage. Early establishment is equated with establishing independence and proving competence on the job, and a career change is viewed as an interruption to this process. Persons in the maintenance stage of their career have considerable commitment to their occupation, and often are in a process of retirement planning when forced to make a career change. In the initial stages of the career counselling process these internal locational issues must be explored in order to prepare the way for new choices.

In his analysis of the CRTP program in Manitoba, Jim Walker (1987) stated that 73% of the clientele preferred to maintain their rural residence. From one perspective this is a wise choice, as uprooting could further compound the losses facing the individual. However, rural locations usually provide limited

opportunities in the labour market. At first glance, service occupations and agriculturally related positions provide most opportunities. Consequently creative alternatives must be pursued in order to maximize personalized career choices for these clients, while being responsive to labour market requirements of the area. Examples of case studies to date exemplify this as clients have pursued careers in such occupations as gun-smithing, plumbing, woodworking, and mechanical drafting. A second double-edged factor in relation to location is that of the close network a small community can provide. Once individuals are comfortable with their decisions to career change, counselling in networking skills can prove advantageous. Prior to this acceptance however, individual may be reticent to declare their intentions to their community.

When counselling farm individuals in this situation it is often necessary to involve the whole family. It is likely that the family has been an integrated part of this career path to date. The "wife" may no longer have the role of helpmate/partner in the "business". She too may be in need of career counselling as she makes the transition from farm to other employment. If the client career changes to a 9-5 position this can lead to major changes in relationship factors. Often working with whole families can create the most viable options as well as insuring that a supportive environment is created for this change to occur.

While attempting to provide a maximizing alternative for the client, the counsellor must be aware that time and money are critical factors. It is often a financial crisis which brought

the client to this point. In addition, the client may feel hurried to rejoin the stream of life. Long term training is not often a viable or perhaps desirable option. In addition to the issues above, some clients lack confidence due to age or length of time since they were in school. If retraining is necessary, it must reflect individual concerns and economic realities.

When assisting clients in career exploration a detailed skill analysis may be required. Many have little formal education (80.6% Grade XII or lower) (J. Walker, 1987). Many have transferable skills which have been learned "on the job" but often these are survival skills which are not necessarily sophisticated enough for a direct transfer to another work place. However, these skills can provide the individual with valuable clues about aptitudes, skills, interests and physical resources which are valuable in the career selection process.

Ultimately it is the counsellor's role to assist the individual in integrating past experiences, interests, abilities, and present resources and translate this information into career options. Perhaps the most critical element and benefit of career counselling is the heightened self-esteem and self-confidence which develops during the process. This enables the client to identify and overcome barriers to employment, thereby developing a plan for transition.

Solution are as individual as the clients who create them. The CRTP offers three assistance options to help clients translate action plans into action. These are wage subsidies, self-employment grants and retraining opportunities. Case studies

indicate an interest in the wage subsidy option, perhaps as a result of the close network which can exist in rural communities. Many clients have opted for the retraining option, ideally to integrate past skills and current interests with today's labour market.

Much of this retraining has been contracted through South Winnipeg Technical Centre. This is a unique educational environment and ideal for many CRTP clients. First there are no entrance requirements at the Centre. This removes an initial barrier for many clients. All students are assessed, focussing on technical English and mathematics skills. If the trainee tests below the level required to successfully complete a program, course specific upgrading is provided as a component of the course of studies. All programs are short-term, with a duration of ten months or less. This is responsive to the needs of the client in terms of time efficiency.

South Winnipeg Technical Centre utilizes an Individualized Competency Based Learning (ICBL) method of program delivery. The flexibility of ICBL allows many options, including individualized curriculum, distance education, as well as granting credit for previous experience. One case study documents this flexibility particularly well. Its innovative approach won national recognition from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. This program, Plumbing -- a Pre-employment Training Program, was created for one individual. Theory was presented in an ICBL format, following a distance education mode. This allowed for minimal location disruption for the trainee. South Winnipeg

Technical Centre monitored, trouble-shot and evaluated progress. To complement the theoretical base, South Winnipeg Technical Centre arranged two work attachment locations for the trainee. The outcomes of this approach to training were:

1. Comprehensive training which for the most part did not require the individual to relocate in order to retrain.
2. Individual learning which was directed only toward those competencies which the trainee must master to become a competent trades person.
3. A motivated and self-directed individual who has the potential for increasing productivity.

Summary:

In summary, although farmers have not been a traditional client group for personal and career counsellors, their financial plight over the past few years with the resulting need for career change has resulted in the establishment of the Canadian Rural Transition Program and interest in farmers as a special target group for counselling strategies. This presentation has shared two models for the use of counsellors working with farm career changers, a career change model and a grief model. It is our belief that these models, along with the background issues and resulting strategies, will have transferable benefit to situations involving other Canadians facing forced career changes in the future.

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